

Input for the UN review on the **future** of UN peace operations

August 2025

In light of the UN Secretary-General's upcoming review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations, PAX presents recommendations based on decades of peacebuilding work with local communities in conflict-affected countries, such as Iraq and South Sudan. Addressing these issues will be essential to maintain the legitimacy and effectiveness of UN peace operations, and ensure that the UN is fit for future challenges.

Integrating **environmental and climate** considerations

From resources competition and displacement, to biodiversity loss and the disruption of essential ecosystem services, environmental degradation is undermining peace and security objectives. In the near future, this is only expected to become worse.

UN agencies and bodies have begun acknowledging environment-climate-security risks in peace operations, as seen in the work of DPPA, DPO, the Peacebuilding Commission and Fund (PBC and PBF respectively), the [Climate Security Mechanism](#) (CSM), and field Missions like UNMISS. However, these efforts remain fragmented and insufficient. Operative language in Mission mandates is limited only to climate security risks, environmental impacts of missions' own actions, and natural resources management. Future mandates must address the full spectrum of [Environment, Peace and Security](#) (EPS) concerns: conflict-linked environmental damage, supporting environmental governance, and restoring access to ecosystem services. UN must invest in partnerships and adequate resourcing. The PBF and PBC have proven potential in advancing EPS-related initiatives, but face significant funding and political constraints. PAX therefore urges the UN to:

- Encourage Member States to commit to increasing flexible, long-term contributions to the PBF with dedicated allocations for environmental and climate peacebuilding.
- Embed EPS principles across the mandates, planning, and implementation of UN peace operations.
- Implement systematic, EPS-related reporting requirements across all UN Missions, and ensure the availability of trained personnel and clear policy mandates.
- Leverage operational partnerships with regional organizations, local civil society, and scientific institutions to support cross-border EPS initiatives, build local capacity, and integrate [diverse knowledge systems](#) – especially those of women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples – as vital sources of peacebuilding expertise.

- Adopt a [thematic resolution](#) on EPS in the UNGA or the UNSC to provide the conceptual coherence and operational traction necessary to embed environmental considerations in the UN's peace efforts.

➔ For more, see PAX's [policy report](#) 'Advancing the International Environment, Peace and Security Agenda: Recommendations for the UN and Beyond'.

Integrating **CHM** capabilities and activities

UN peacekeeping operations have increasingly had to rely on the use of force – including more kinetic and offensive operations – to carry out mandated activities, such as the protection of civilians. As with all kinetic operations, peacekeeping operations will cause direct and reverberating harm to civilians—risks that are even greater without standardized and comprehensive guidance to report, track, minimize and address civilian harm. Beyond the devastating impact on civilians, such failures threaten the UN's legitimacy and reputation.

The UN has taken significant steps in recent years to incorporate Civilian Harm Mitigation (CHM) into peacekeeping operations. Mission mandates—such as MINUSCA's—now include language on monitoring, minimizing, and addressing harm caused by UN peacekeepers. CHM has also been included in [reports](#) by the Special Committee on Peacekeeping (C34), in the [2023 revision](#) of the DPO PoC Policy, and as an aim in the [A4P+ Priorities for 2021-23](#).

Still, major gaps remain. Understanding of CHM, how it differs from International Humanitarian Law obligations, and how to implement it in practice [remains limited](#). Many missions lack robust data systems to assess impacts on host populations, and good practices remain ad hoc rather than institutionalized within and across operations.

It is crucial that recent progress on PoC be preserved and built upon by including PoC as a central feature in UN peacebuilding review. PAX's years of on-the-ground research and grassroots engagement with communities impacted by conflict has demonstrated how the integration of PoC and CHM into peace operations translates into tangible, meaningful improvements in security for civilians. To do so, PAX urges the UN to:

- Develop standardized and UN-system-wide guidance on CHM.
- Implement robust civilian harm tracking and reporting mechanisms to boost the resilience of future UN peace operations.
- Create clear mechanisms, policies, procedures, and responsibilities for tracking, preventing, minimizing, and addressing civilian harm. Ensure that these involve Mission police, military, and civilian components, but also external CSOs.
- Increase knowledge around the CHM concept and its implementation through tailored pre-deployment and in-mission training, including context-specific and scenario-based training that draws on past Mission successes or failures.

➔ For more, see PAX's [event summary report](#) 'Advancing Civilian Harm Mitigation in UN Peacekeeping'.

Integrating responsible **transition and exit** strategies

Any UN Mission's ultimate goal is to become unnecessary—to transition responsibilities to host governments able and willing to provide inclusive, civilian-focused security and protection. However, transition or withdrawal planning is too often lacking, particularly planning to transfer critical responsibilities and capacities to host governments. A withdrawal gone wrong – as perceived by civilian populations – not only undermines the UN's overall reputation, it also risks civilians' safety and security.

In recent years, UN missions have increasingly withdrawn from countries due to political or financial pressures, such as [Mali](#) to [Sudan](#) and [Iraq](#). This [often comes](#) with less protection for civilians; reduced human rights monitoring – particularly for vulnerable groups like minorities, women, and LGBTQIA+ peoples; fewer resources for DDR and IDP returns; and overall, a significant risk that painstaking gains won over years of peacekeeping and peacebuilding will be halted or lost. UN Missions' lack of transparent communication about these transitions has also undermined responsible transition of responsibilities to UN and non-UN entities.

UNAMI's imminent withdrawal is a case in point. Iraqi civilians and civil society [interviewed](#) by PAX regard the UN's presence as a stabilizing factor that has helped protect human rights, and have expressed concerns, that with UNAMI soon to be gone, already [existing concerns](#) over matters like shrinking civic space and the targeting of Iraqi activists will be exacerbated. A lack of meaningful consultation on UNAMI's withdrawal has only created additional uncertainty and unrest. This [echoes](#) Congolese civil society frustrations over MONUSCO's withdrawal. To better protect civilians during Mission transitions and withdrawals, the UN should:

- Advocate for donor support to deploy protection-specific capacities in multinational organizations other than the UN, such as the African Union and ECOWAS.
- Prioritize funding for community-based protection mechanisms.
- Promote inclusive and integrated planning involving host states, UN Country Teams, humanitarians, and civil society before mission withdrawals.
- Prioritize active engagement and consultation with local civil society and non-UN protection actors.
- Explore creating and supporting national protection strategies with governments as part of Mission withdrawals and transitions.

➔ For more on information on this topic as it pertains to UNAMI's withdrawal from Iraq, see PAX's [report](#) 'A Protection of Civilians snapshot: Iraq, 2024-25.'

For more information on PAX's work on the Protection of Civilians and/or our UN advocacy, please reach out to Ms. Carrie Huisman, Project Lead PoC Advocacy, at huisman@paxforpeace.nl.